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Labu The Little Lake Dweller

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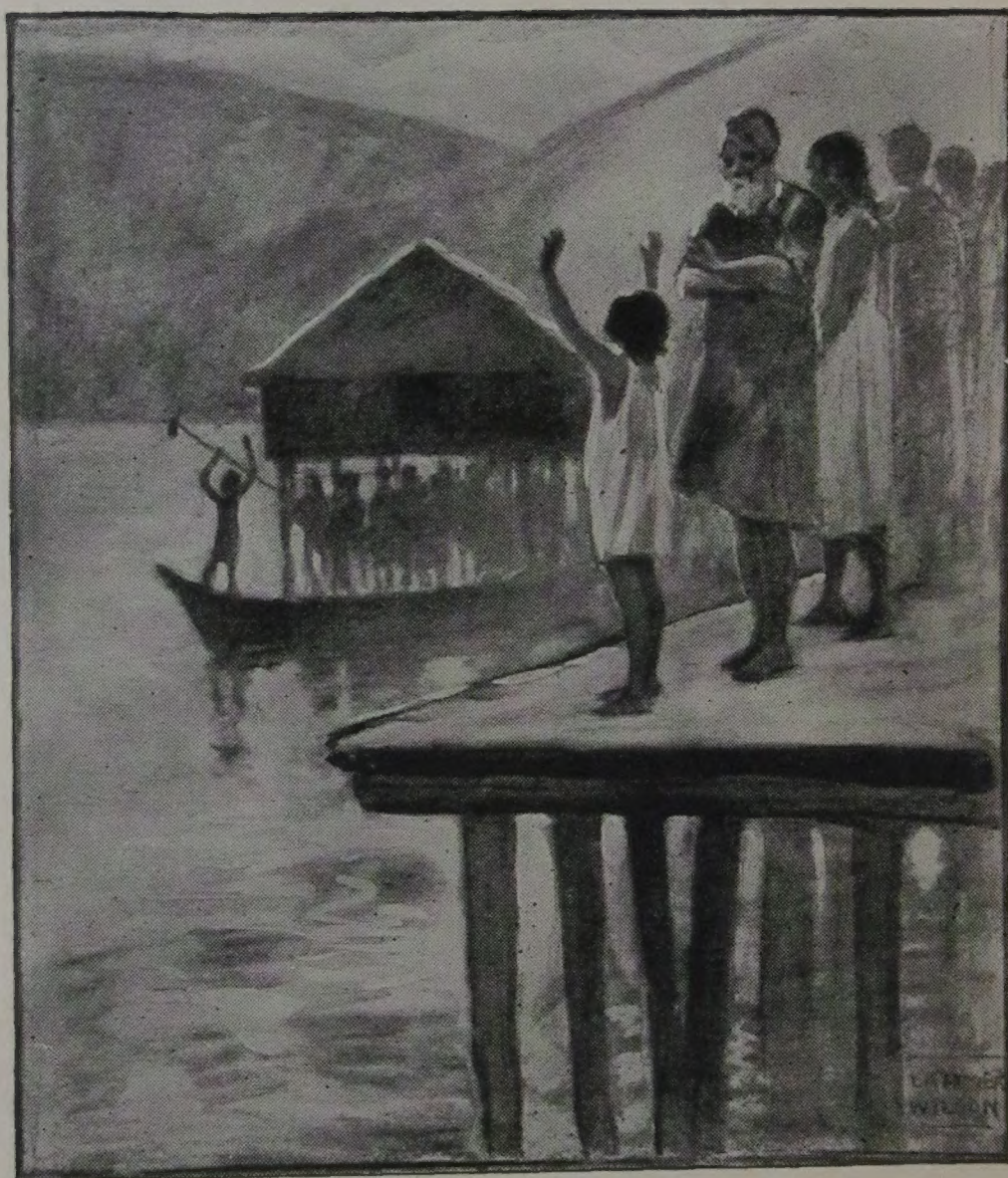
BY

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"The little boy unconsciously followed the movement"—Page 9

Labu the Little Lake Dweller

CHAPTER I

The Lodge of the Morning

"Oo-ah! Oo-ah!" crooned Malin, rocking back and forth in the little canoe. The sun was very bright on the water and the light almost blinded her as she looked out across the lake to see if the boats were coming home. It was time for them, for the sun had long been high, and Malin knew they could not catch fish after the morning shadows, which the mountains cast across the water, were gone.

The canoe swung easily to and fro. Labu, cuddled down by his mother's side, dropped off to sleep. Above their heads the rude logs of the platform under which the little boat was tied made a shade to keep off the glare of the climbing sun. As it rose higher, Malin drew up the bark rope which held the canoe to one of the big logs of the pier so that they would still be in the shadow.

We would think the village on the Swiss lake where Labu lived a very queer one, but to him it seemed very fine indeed. All his five years he had heard stories of the great deeds done by the people of the Lodge of the Morning, and he was proud to think he lived there in-

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stead of in some village not so powerful. He liked to hear old Nizek, his grandfather, tell of the days when many young men had come from another side of the Lake, far toward the west, and had with much labor and hopeful courage set the piles and built the first dwellings on the great platform. And because they had built on the east side of the Lake, near to where the sun rose, they had called their new home the Lodge of the Morning.

There was still another reason for giving the village this name. It was placed at one of the few points about the Lake where a pass between two lofty mountains allowed the early sun to reach through. The mountains about the cup-shaped lakes of Switzerland are very closely set together, and in most places the sun must have climbed very near to the middle of the sky before it could send its welcome beams across the shadowy water. But in the Lodge of the Morning it shone early, slanting its long, level rays through the narrow pass and making a glory both of the lapping water and of the snowy peaks that were reflected in it.

Old Nizek had been for many years the Chief of the village, but when he grew too old to lead his people in the chase or in battle against their enemies he had begged them to release him from the cares of the position and to put in his place his son Gigan, Labu's father. Then, because he still wished to be of use to his beloved people, he took upon himself the care of the fishing-nets which the men used, and sat day after day in the sun in front of his tiny cottage making or mending the nets. Labu loved to sit beside him and watch his slim, brown

fingers weave the fibers into stout meshes while he told stories of his own young days.

"I was taller than Gigan, thy father, little one," he would say proudly, throwing his shoulders back and stretching out his arms. "I could hew down trees with my great axe that were larger and of harder wood than could any other man in the village. In those days they called me Nizek, Slayer of Forests; but now I am only Nizek, Maker of Nets," he would finish a little sadly.

When Gigan heard him say this he would always answer kindly: "But what would we do without nets, my father?" And Nizek would reply that he thanked the gods for giving him hands that were useful.

Gigan was tall and straight, with brown hair that curled about his ears. Labu and his pretty little mother, Malin, thought him by far the most handsome man in the village. The house where they lived was next to Nizek's little dwelling, and was the largest one of all the many clustered on the immense log platform. It was almost in the center of the village, and had a pair of huge antlers from the head of a mountain stag hung over the doorway. The cracks between the logs were carefully chinked with clay, and the curtain that closed the door was of beautifully dressed skins.

As Malin rocked in the canoe and watched for the fishing boats to come home she could look down and see the great masses of rocks which were heaped on the lake bottom to keep the heavy piles in place. The piles could not be driven into the bed of the lake, as was done in many of the villages, because the bottom was rocky, so

they had to be steadied by having great masses of stones heaped about their bases.

Across the level tops of the upright logs the great beams that formed the framework of the platform were fastened with thick wooden pins, and the spaces between them were filled with brushwood and small tree trunks, criss-crossed and interlaced to make a solid platform upon which could be safely built the many small log houses that made up the village. From one side of the platform a long, narrow pier led to the shore, some little distance away. This was nothing much but a foot-log, which could be easily removed if there was any fear of an attack upon the village.

All this would seem very strange to us who are accustomed to living in houses built on land, but if we had lived in the days when Labu did we would have been glad to know that none of the wild animals of the forest, or the even more fierce tribes of savage men that sometimes traveled across the mountains, could attack us without our knowing it. So we would have thought the Lodge of the Morning a very good place to live, I suppose, just as Labu did.

CHAPTER II

The Boats Come Home

Pretty soon Malin sat up straight and leaned forward, shading her eyes with her hand. The movement roused Labu, who slid to the bottom of the canoe, rubbing his eyes with his small, brown fist.

"Look, my son," cried Malin, pointing away across the lake.

Labu gave a shout of delight.

Out of the shadows that always lingered at the foot of the mountains there came several long canoes, riding low in the water. Each was paddled by two or three men who stood upright. At the prow of the leading boat sat Gigan, his curling hair looking like bronze in the sun, and his dark woolen tunic thrown open at the throat. In his hand he held a great spear with a barbed point of skilfully wrought stone, and as he saw his wife and son he raised it with a gesture of greeting.

Malin tossed the long hair out of her eyes and answered the greeting with a pretty gesture. She bent forward to look at the advancing canoes.

"They have had the gods with them at last," she cried to the little boy. "See, my Labu, how deep the boats lie in the water. They are laden well with fish. Now we will not need to be hungry for a long, long time. The gods are very good."

Catching Labu by the hand she clambered quickly up the little ladder that led to the top of the platform.

"The boats are coming! The boats are coming!" she cried, running from door to door.

In a moment the wide space in front of the houses was filled with eager people. For some days past the fishermen had been unlucky and they had begun to be afraid of a famine. That was why the Chief had gone with them this morning. They thought he might persuade the gods to be generous with them.

Among the rest came Nizek, hobbling along with a stout staff. He had waited even more anxiously than the rest, for he remembered another time, years ago, when the fish had been too wary to be caught and the crops from the small fields among the mountain valleys had been very scanty. He thought, as did all the people of the Lake, that when such things happened the gods were very angry with them; and when the gods were angry they could do nothing but offer sacrifices to bring them into a good humor again.

"We must make a thank-feast to the gods," declared Nizek solemnly as the boats drew near and he saw the heavy load of fish they carried.

The men brought the canoe in which Gigan sat first to the edge of the platform. The others drew up beside it, and the men in the boats as well as the people on the platform stood very still, speaking not a word. They knew the Chief was about to make the "thank-gift" to the gods who had been so kind.

Taking a fine, large fish on the point of his barbed

spear, Gigan stood up in the prow of the boat and held both arms high above his head.

"Food was in thy hands; thou hast laid it in ours," chanted Gigan, turning his face to the sky.

"All the people are glad," replied a hundred voices.

"From hunger thy bounty has saved thy thankful ones," went on Gigan.

"All the people are glad," rolled the chanting voices in reply. Labu, his eyes fixed on his father, sang the responses with the rest. As Gigan lifted his hands high above his head the little boy unconsciously followed the movement, raising his own arms as high as he could reach, with a look of wonder and awe in his face.

Then with a quick fling of his spear Gigan sent the shining fish far out into the lake. It whirled about a moment, then sank quickly, and a great shout went up from the people. They thought the gods had accepted their gift and were pleased with them.

Malin and Nizek had been watching Labu all the time. They knew that when Gigan grew old it would probably fall to Labu to become the Chief of the village, and they were anxious to see whether he would be likely to rule well. Nizek thought he could tell by the way the little lad entered into the spirit of the "thank-gift."

"He will do well—he will do well," whispered Nizek to Malin as the crowd broke up and the men began to unload the fish. "He hath in his face the look of one who speaks with the gods."

And Malin, her face tender with mother-love, drew the lad close to her and went to meet the Chief.

CHAPTER III

Adan Brings Home a Bride

One of Labu's best friends in the Lodge of the Morning was a young man named Adan. He was one of the swiftest runners and best hunters among them all. He could throw a harpoon straighter and strike a heavier blow with an axe than any other man in the village except the Chief himself.

There was another way in which Adan was very skilful, though he was still only a very young man. He could make better spears, sharper axes, and hammers with a truer balance than anyone else in the whole village. When any of the hunters or axe-men wanted an especially fine weapon or tool, they always came to Adan to get him to make it.

These were all made of a very hard stone, and it took a great deal of time and carefulness to chip off the flakes in just the right places so as to get the edges of the axes true and even, and the sides of the spears rightly balanced. Sometimes Adan grew almost angry when a piece which he had nearly finished broke in his hand, and he would cry out impatiently:

"Surely the gods must know of some better way to make these things. There must be in the world something else besides these stones from which we might make axes and knives and spears."

One day old Nizek, who was watching him at work on a beautiful barbed harpoon point, heard him say something of this kind. "I have seen—" began the old man, then suddenly stopped. "Well, well," he went on slowly, "the stone is very good after all, and the gods must have meant us to use it. When they want us to have other materials they will send them."

"You have seen something—what is it?" asked Adan.

"Many things—many things," muttered Nizek, shaking his head and moving away. And though Adan followed, and begged hard, he would not say another word.

Adan had made for Labu a small axe of the same flaked stone as his own, and it was the little boy's greatest delight to go into the woods on the shore with his friend and help to fell the great trees in the forest. This they did by building a fire about the base of each, to weaken the trunk by burning, and then hewing it down with their axes after the fire had burned as much as it would. Labu always brought the dry brushwood for Adan's fires, and carried the coals from his mother's hearth very carefully in a clay bowl. Adan would praise him and declare he could not work without Labu to help.

One day Labu wanted to go to the woods, but he could find nothing of Adan. He looked all about through the village asking who had seen him.

"I cannot find Adan," said Labu, almost crying, as he ran up to his grandfather, who was making nets in the morning sunshine.

"Never fear," replied Nizek, shaking his head wisely. "He is not lost. He will come back, and not alone."

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Malin, who stood near, smiled, for she remembered that Adan had made several long journeys lately. There was another clan far over on the other side of the Lake where there were said to live many handsome maidens, and Malin had her suspicions that Adan was finding the Lodge of the Long Shadows very attractive.

She smiled again as she remembered the day when Gigan had come to steal her away from her own people, who had also lived in a far-away village, on another lake.

One morning Malin was busy turning the fish, drying on a long rack in front of her cottage, when Labu came running up to tell her that Adan's canoe was coming.

She looked out across the water and saw it rapidly approaching, Adan's long, skilful strokes of the paddle sending it skimming through the water as lightly as a bird. He stood as straight and proud as a young oak, greeting Malin with a bright smile, and making an eager gesture toward a girl who sat in the stern of the boat. Malin saw that she was slender, with bright, dark eyes and long, waving brown hair. This she had bound about her forehead with a band of gaily colored beads, and on her arm was a circlet of a peculiar brownish metal. Her dress was of soft and beautiful woolen cloth, decorated with a bright border, and about her neck was a string of delicate shells.

"Malin!" cried Adan gladly as he drew the boat to the foot of the little ladder. He was glad that she was the first one to greet the timid stranger who had won his love, for he knew the wife of the Chief and the mother of Labu had a kind heart and would make her welcome.

"My name is Berde," said the girl shyly as Adan lifted her to the platform beside Malin.

"Thou art welcome, Berde," said Malin heartily. "Thou hast done well, Adan," she added mischievously. "Thy bride is worth the labor of setting many new piles."

"Gigan, the Chief, could never set piles enough to show forth the worth of Malin," said Adan gallantly.

"Thou art wanting my favor for thee with the Chief," she cried gayly. Well, be not afraid. He will be glad to confirm thy marriage when it brings us so sweet a maid."

Labu, who had been shyly hiding from the newcomer, now ran out boldly and said to Adan, "I will go to help thee cut the piles."

Adan laughed and swung the little lad to his shoulder.

"This is my comrade, sweet Berde," he said. "He will help me to take care of thee."

Berde put up her hand coaxingly and her lips quivered. She had left a little brother in the Lodge of the Long Shadows, and she was glad to find a lad like Labu to take his place in her new home.

"Come," said Malin, "thou art hungry, and it is time this great hunter was off after other game than beautiful young maidens."

She shook her finger with great severity at Adan, and led Berde away to her own cottage to rest.

"We must find the Chief," said Adan soberly to Labu. "When will he come back?"

"Tonight," replied Labu. "And here is my grandfather wanting to speak to thee."

CHAPTER IV

The Chief Passes Judgment

When a young man of the Lake people married his choice of a wife must first be approved by the Chief. If he thought the maiden would make a good wife, and would be a good addition to the village, he ordered the young bridegroom to set enough piles to support the dwelling that must be built for them. But if there were any reasons why the Chief did not want to receive her as a member of the Clan, he was at liberty to send her back at once to her own people.

So it was with a somewhat anxious heart that Adan waited for Gigan to come home. The Chief and a party of men had been gone all day on a hunting trip, and it had long been dark when they returned. Malin met her husband at the pier with news of Adan's home-coming. She was anxious to speak a good word for her to Gigan before Adan had a chance to ask for his approval.

But when Gigan learned that Berde came from the Lodge of the Long Shadow he shook his head doubtfully.

"I do not like the Clan," he said. "They do not till their land well, and it is said that they sometimes take the flocks that belong to other villages."

"But if you could see Berde," coaxed Malin. "She is like a child—so sweet and good. She would not steal sheep," she added, laughing merrily at the very thought.

"Well, we will see," replied Gigan. "We must not let Adan make a mistake. It is a great thing to choose a wife wisely." He looked lovingly at Malin, and she smiled into his grave eyes. She understood what he meant.

"We think Adan has chosen very wisely, don't we, Labu?" said Malin, looking down at her little son.

"Berde is partly mine," said Labu soberly. "Adan has promised to let me help take care of her."

Gigan laughing, swung the little fellow to his shoulder.

"Thou art over young to break thy heart over the sending home of a maiden," he said. "Well, we will see."

All the people of the village gathered in the wide space in front of the dwellings to see what Gigan would decide about Adan's bride. They made a great circle, at one side of which was the skin-covered seat upon which the Chief sat when public matters were to be discussed.

Gigan, wearing the amber circlet that showed his rank, took his place on the seat, and Adan came forward leading the stranger maid. Labu was dancing with excitement just outside the circle, back of the Chief's seat.

Berde held tightly to Adan's hand. She was too frightened to do more than glance shyly at the Chief. In spite of Malin's whispered words of courage she was afraid she might be bidden to return home, and she thought, with a rising sob, that her heart would break if she could not stay with Adan.

For some moments the Chief gazed earnestly at the girlish figure. It was a solemn thing for the Clan to receive a stranger, and he must be sure she was worthy before he welcomed her.

A pair of soft arms stole about Gigan's neck and he looked around to see that Labu had stolen up behind him. The little boy could stand the suspense no longer. His father must bid Berde stay in the Lodge of the Morning.

"My son!" said Gigan in sharp reproof.

"She—she is like the blue flowers my mother wears in her hair," Labu almost sobbed. "Why wilt thou not speak to her?"

Gigan glanced across to where Malin sat among the other matrons. His eyes grew wonderfully tender as they looked again at Adan and the girl he had brought across the water. Perhaps he thought of the day when he had stood with Malin before another Chief, his own stern father, Nizek.

"We are glad to have the flowers bloom in the Lodge of the Morning," he said at last softly. "Thou must bring many piles that are straight and strong to honor the dwelling of so fair a bride, Adan."

Then, with a great sigh of gladness Adan gathered his little bride in his arms, and the people came close to them to bid her welcome. But Gigan looked to where Malin sat, for he knew she would have a bright smile for him.

Labu worked busily to help light the great fires that were needed for the feast. For many hours the people of the Lodge sang and danced, for all loved Adan.

"I will show you where there are many fine berries tomorrow," whispered Labu, slipping his hand into Berde's.

"Tomorrow," she said softly, looking at Adan with adoring eyes.



"He was so frightened that he did not think of dropping his prize"

CHAPTER V

The Game in the Woods

Labu grew very fast. Summers and winters went by and he no longer cuddled down by his mother's side to watch for the fishing boats. Sometimes he was allowed to go with them himself, and the men were very proud of his skill with the net and spear. They piled skins in the prow of the boat and made him sit there in state, calling him "Little Chief," for they were glad to think that when Gigan should be too old to lead them his son would be brave and strong enough to take his place. But Labu did not much like to think about being a Chief, for it seemed to him that a Chief never had as much fun as other people.

Best of all he liked to follow his father and the axe-men when they went to cut new timbers for the piles or the platform. For as the village grew, more houses must be provided for, since very few people ever moved away from the Lodge of the Morning.

Gigan often sent Adan in charge of the axe-men, for he was skilful in the art of felling trees, and was a good leader in case anything should happen. One day Adan had taken a number of men and gone to a cove some distance away to work. Labu and several other boys had gone with them and while the men were busy with the timber they played about in the woods. They had one game that they liked especially well. They called it Hunting the Bear. They would all sit down in a circle and cover their eyes, and then one of them would slip away and hide where he thought they could not find him. Then they would scatter in every direction looking for him.

It was Labu's turn to be the bear. The boys all sat down and put their hands over their eyes singing this song:

There's a great bear in the mountain;
We will hunt for him and find him;
To his cave his track we'll follow;
We are hunters brave and wary.

Labu slipped softly away while they were singing. They sang loudly so they could not hear which way he was going, for that would have spoiled all the fun. He wanted to find a place where none of them had ever thought of looking. He did not want them to find him, for if they did they would take him out in a canoe and

throw him into the water and make him swim ashore. They said all bears should learn how to swim.

Pretty soon he came to a cave he had never noticed before. It ran back into the side of a hill, and looked like a good place to hide, for there were thick vines growing all about. Very carefully he made his way through the low opening.

He had to put his hand out to keep from falling against the wall, and was startled to feel something furry brush against it. He stopped still and drew quickly back. But there was no sound except a soft little rustle at one side of the cave. Very carefully he put out his hand again, and again it touched the furry body. Something nestled against his arm, and he drew it toward him, stroking the soft fur gently. When he had come into the light he saw that it was a tiny bear—a baby bear that winked and blinked in the light and did not seem the least bit afraid.

Labu forgot all about hiding. He had found a real bear, and was in a hurry to show it to the other boys. He hugged it tight in his arms and ran down toward the lake. A fierce growl from behind startled him. He glanced back just in time to see a furry, dark-brown body come lumbering out of a thicket beside the cave and start awkwardly down the hill toward him. With a cry of terror Labu started to run, still hugging the little bear closely to him. He was so frightened that he did not think of dropping his prize. He only thought of getting away as fast as he could.

The boys heard him cry out, and came to meet him, but when they saw the great animal so close behind him they

turned and went the other way as fast as they could.

"Run! Run!" they shouted, racing down to where the men were at work.

Adan saw them coming and knew something was the matter. He called out two or three times before any of the boys could get breath enough to answer.

"Labu! Labu! The bear! The bear!" they cried.

In a flash Adan understood. Shouting to the men to follow, he seized his huge stone axe and started toward the hill. Labu, seeing help so near, ran faster than ever. But the bear was gaining upon him at every step, maddened by the frightened cries of the little animal which Labu still clasped tightly in his arms.

A vine lay across the path, and Labu caught his foot in it. The baby bear, caught beneath him as he fell, gave a sharp cry of pain. The mother, with a scream of rage, gathered herself for a spring.

But Adan, with a mighty bound, hurled his powerful body forward almost into the enraged bear's face. With both hands he brought the heavy axe down on the beast's skull, and the bear threw herself back on her haunches with a howl.

Labu, quick to take his chance, rolled aside and regained his feet. He was too dazed to know exactly what had happened, but he knew that Adan was there and that he was safe.

A fierce battle followed, and it might have ended very badly for Adan if the other men had not come running up with their axes. It was over in a few minutes, and the great bear lay motionless on the ground, while Adan, his

arm torn and bleeding, but otherwise unhurt, showed proudly the wide gash his first blow had made in the bear's scalp.

They bore the big animal home with great ceremony. It was the first one that had been killed near the Lake for a long time, and was so large that it was a great prize. The skin was taken off and the meat was cut in strips and dried in the sun after the people had made a feast in honor of the bravery of Adan. Gigan thought Adan should have the beautiful skin, but Berde shook her head with a little shiver.

"I would always be thinking that Adan might have been killed," she said. "Let the skin belong to Gigan, the Chief, who welcomed Adan's bride to the Lodge of the Morning."

So the great bearskin was hung up in the dwelling of the Chief, where it kept many a cold wind from chilling the warmth within. The baby bear was kept in an empty cabin at one end of the platform, and Labu thought it a most wonderful pet and taught it many tricks. He called it Aume, from the queer, growling sound it made when it was hungry.

CHAPTER VI

Labu's New Coat

The winter was very long in the mountains and the wind swept down across the Lake, bringing bitter cold and much snow with it. Every day the men had to go to the forests to bring wood for the fires in the cabins. The women were kept busy making coats to keep them warm. They spun and wove the wool from the sheep that were kept in the pastures among the mountains. All day the looms could be heard at work before the clay hearths that were built in the ends of the houses.

Wool was not very plentiful that winter. Many sheep had been lost in the storms, and some of the flocks had been stolen. So there was hardly enough to make warm coats for the men who had to work in the cold.

Malin looked at Labu in his worn tunic of linen and sighed. She knew she could not spare wool to make him a new one, but her heart ached for her little son and she determined that he should have a coat of some sort. The skin of the great bear was hanging against the wall. They needed it there to keep out the biting wind, and anyway it was not just the thing to make a coat of for a slender lad like Labu. As Malin drew the long hair through her fingers she thought how much it was like fine, soft wool. If she could only make it into cloth as she did the wool, what a fine coat it would make for Labu.

She took a sharp knife and cut off a long lock. Then she brought out her loom and set it up before the fire. There were holes in the floor in which she set the posts of the loom, and she fastened the top of the frame with strips of leather.

Very patiently she worked, cutting off new locks of hair from the skin as fast as she needed them. When night came she put the loom carefully away behind the hanging skin, for she did not want Labu to see it until it was done.

By and by the cloth was finished. Malin laid it down on a smooth place on the floor, stretching it very tightly and laying heavy rocks on the corners to keep it in place. She used Gigan's hunting knife to cut it with. This was a strange knife that Gigan had found one day when he was hunting a long way from the village. It was not like the stone knives the people of the Lake had always used. It was made of a harder material and had a keener edge. No one had ever seen any metal like it until Berde came, and then they noticed that the armlet she wore was of the same material. When Gigan asked her where she got the armlet, she told him that her father had found it in the hills a long way from their village, and had brought it home to her.

"There must be gods in the hills," said Gigan thoughtfully. He thought all the people in the world were like the people who lived on the Lake, and so anything different from the things they had always used must come from the gods.

But old Nizek shook his head. He had lived many

years longer than Gigan, and was not so sure about all people being alike.

"I remember well—" he began, then stopped. "Another time—I will tell you another time," he said hastily. "It is not time yet."

But, wherever it came from, the knife was stout and keen, and in a very little while the coat was cut out and ready to be sewed up. Malin brought a long, sharp needle made of bone, and some fibers she had taken from a plant that grew in the mountain fields.

She sang as she sewed, for she was glad to have so nice a coat for her dear boy. Sometimes she laughed softly as she thought how pleased he would be. When she happened to glance at the shorn bearskin she felt a little afraid of what Gigan would say, for he had been very proud of the beautiful gift.

How pleased Labu was when he awoke one morning to find the new coat thrown across his shoulders.

"Now I can go to the woods with the men, mother," he cried. Then he noticed the ruined skin. "But what will my father say?"

"I think he will say that it is better than to have thee suffer from the cold, my son," said Malin gently. "And it keeps the wind out just as well now as it did before."



"I will make a picture of Adan killing the bear", said Labu

CHAPTER VII

A Queer Story-Book

The more Malin looked at the bearskin the more she wanted to make it look nice again. At last she thought of a way to do so. She took it down and spread it out on the platform. Then she cut small slits all around the edges, and through these she drove stout bone pins into

the logs to hold the skin in place. Then she took Gigan's knife and scraped the skin until it was very smooth.

She made a hammer by tying a round-headed stone to a thick stick, and with this she pounded the skin until it was soft. After she had done this she hung it back upon the wall, stretching it to place with the bone pins.

Then she took a piece of coal from the fireplace and drew a pattern all around the edge of the skin. She worked until she had made a very handsome pattern, and was very proud of it. But when she brushed against it the coal rubbed off and it was spoiled.

Malin remembered that she had seen colored clay along the shore. She wondered if that would rub off as the coal had done. She took a basket and went to get some. She found two or three colors of the clay, some brown, some yellow and some dark red.

The pattern was more beautiful than ever when she had made it over again with the colored clay. Old Nizek brought the fish-net he was making and sat where he could watch her at work. The women came too, and by and by they all began to make skin-pictures. Berde watched with the rest, but said nothing. One day not long after, Malin saw her at work on a soft deerskin which she was making into a coat for Adan. She was putting a border around the edge like the one Malin had made. It was not long till most of the other women were making coats with borders.

One day Labu found some of the colored clay his mother had used. He took it and drew a picture on the great, smooth bearskin. It was very rude, but any one would

have known that it was meant to represent a bear.

"I will make a picture of Adan killing the bear," said Labu, and he soon had a queer little drawing of a man standing beside the bear with an axe in his uplifted hand. Then he drew the picture of the little boy running away from the bear, and before he was through he had made drawings enough to tell the whole story. He said it would help them to remember it.

"I have seen many things that should not be forgotten," said Nizek with a sigh, "but I am old, and no one else knows. The men of the Lake have done many brave things, but who will praise them for their deeds after they are all dead? No one will remember—no one will remember." Nizek shook his gray head sorrowfully.

"We will put them on the bearskin," cried Labu eagerly. "You will tell me the stories and I will make the pictures. Then they will always be remembered—those brave men who lived so long ago."

So for many days Nizek told over to Labu the great deeds that had been done by the Lake people while he was Chief. And Labu drew the pictures of these deeds.

It finally came about that every time the men had a great hunt they would say, "We must have Labu make us a story-picture of our brave doings." So the women dressed many skins, and brought the colored clays, and the men told over their daring deeds while Labu made the pictures about what they told. When there were no skins at hand he would draw on the walls of the houses, and one day he made a picture on a bit of wood with a sharp awl.

CHAPTER VIII

The Passing of Nizek

The people of the Lake had no way of counting time except by the coming and going of seasons. When a child was born a birthstick was hung beside the door of his father's house, and each year as the season of his birth returned a new notch was cut in the stick. Labu was born just as the leaves were beginning to show green in the woods, so every year at the coming of the new leaves Gigan took down his birthstick and made a new notch in it.

One day, soon after the sixteenth notch had been cut in Labu's birthstick, word went round the village that Nizek was very ill. For a long time he had not worked at his net-weaving, but had been content to sit quietly in the sun and tell the children stories of his own childhood. He told them over and over again what the pictures meant that Labu had drawn on the bearskin, and was very proud when they praised him for his brave doings.

When Nizek fell sick every one was sorry. They knew he must soon die, for he was very old, and he told them that the gods were calling him. All the Lake people believed that when one was about to die, the gods sent him a warning that he would soon be taken to another country, and Nizek was sure that they had spoken to him in

a dream and that he would soon start on the long journey to the land where they awaited him.

He sent word to Gigan that he wanted to tell him something, and the Chief came at once to the place where his father lay. He had not been there before, for he thought the Charm-Makers could drive away the evil spirits that brought the sickness better if they were alone. As Gigan came in the Charm-Makers were there, rattling their medicine sticks and muttering strange sentences under their breath. Nizek was half sitting on a soft couch of skins and rushes, looking away toward the west.

"Gigan, my son, said the old man slowly, the time has come that I should tell you of many strange things. Perhaps I have waited too long. But we must be alone.

Gigan motioned the Charm-Makers to leave the room, and in a moment he was alone with his father.

"Lift yonder stone before the doorway," said Nizek.

Gigan stooped and lifted a large stone that lay before the door. Under it he found a hollow cut into the log, and in the hollow a large, round bowl of dark-brown metal. It was very heavy. Nizek motioned him to lift it out of its hiding place and put it on the floor before his couch.

"Many years ago, when thou wert but a babe in thy mother's arms, I made a long journey into a distant country," said Nizek, speaking very slowly and painfully. "One day I came out upon the crest of a hill and saw in the valley below me a strange clan that was preparing to make a sacrifice or perform some other mysterious rite.

They were not like our people, for their faces were fairer and they had long hair that was of the color of the red clay with which Labu makes his pictures. I thought at first it must have been stained to make it so strange a color, but afterward I found out that it was the natural manner of its growth.

"I hid in the shadows above their meeting place and watched them. They made a fire and over it set this great bowl. Into it they put something that looked like rocks. They made the fire very hot, and anxiously watched the substance in the bowl. I could not see what they did, but they praised their gods with a great dance when they were done. I waited till they had all become quiet again and fallen asleep, then I crept down very quietly and took the bowl from the place where they had hidden it in the leaves. I have always kept it just as I found it, and many an hour have I spent trying to learn what mean the strange figures carved all about on the outside of it. I would have asked Labu—the lad has rare skill with the talking marks—but I have been afraid the gods would be angry with me for taking the bowl, and I did not want them to be angry with him, or with thee. So I have kept silent. But I have always wished I might make another journey to that strange land to see if there were other clans of the same kind. The gods must love them better than the people of the Lake, since they have made them greater gifts."

Nizek sank back on his couch panting. He had very little strength left and talking wearied him.

"I dared not answer the summons of the gods until I

had told you—now they can not say I have hidden any thing," he muttered.

But Gigan hardly heard what his father was saying. He was bending over the bowl, examining it closely.

"It is like my hunting knife—like Berde's armlet;" he cried at last. "It must have been made by the same clan. Where say you they were—which way?" he asked eagerly.

"I was traveling west," said Nizek. "It is a journey of many days."

"I must find them," declared Gigan, turning the great bowl about in his hands. "They have a true gift of the gods. This is better and stronger stuff than any we have known, and we must obtain it for our knives and weapons."

Nizek had fallen back on his couch and his face looked gray and strange. Gigan hastily put the bowl back in its hiding place and recalled the Charm-Makers. They came in shouting and clattering their medicine sticks, but Nizek did not hear them. The gods had called him at last.



"Gigan went slowly down the hill"

CHAPTER IX

The Gift of the Gods

It was not long after Nizek's death that Gigan told Malin he must go on a long journey. She did not ask him anything about it, for she knew he would tell her all he thought she needed to know without any questions. She could not help weeping softly as she baked the flat, round cakes he would carry with him, and wove a new

woolen coat to take the place of his worn, old one. There were things to get ready for Labu, too, for Gigan said the lad was to go with him. So the heart of Malin was very sad, even though Labu, with boyish eagerness, talked brightly of the strange lands they would see, and the wonderful gifts they would bring back with them.

Adan was to have charge of the village while the Chief was gone, and Gigan spent many hours giving the young man grave advice about the management of affairs. He called the people together and told them he was going to try to procure for them a great gift from the gods, and that if they loved and honored him—as he knew they did—they were to be obedient to the laws Adan should make, and should pray to the gods to be kind to their Chief and his son. All this they promised faithfully to do.

At last everything was ready and Gigan set out toward the west with Labu beside him. From the last point of the hill path that led up from the Lake they turned and waved goodby to Malin, who was trying hard to be brave.

They traveled westward many days, coming after a time to a country that was not so rough and mountainous as the one surrounding the lakes. They could look for long distances across level lands, sometimes crossing slow streams that looked sluggish enough after the rushing mountain torrents to which they were accustomed.

One day Labu found the broken haft of an axe which was made of the same metal as Gigan's knife. He showed it to his father, and Gigan, taking a large bundle from his shoulder, unwrapped the great metal bowl and told the lad the story he had heard from Nizek.

"I found a spear of the same metal back yonder a ways," he said, "and here is an armlet much like the one that Berde wears. All these things tell me that we are nearing the land of which my father spoke."

It had been a long time since they had seen any lakes. They met now and then a wandering tribe of people, but kept out of sight. Gigan remembered what Nizek had said about the peculiar color of the hair of the people whom he had seen, and watched till he should see the men with the red hair before he approached any one.

One day they came to a little lake lying in a basin among some low hills. It seemed more like home than any place they had seen in a long time. As they came out on the crest of one of the hills and could look down into the valley, they saw a large number of people gathered on the shore of the lake.

"Look!" cried Labu in great excitement. "Are not these the people you seek? They have hair the color of the sun when it sets."

Gigan looked eagerly down into the camp. Sure enough there were the tawny heads which Nizek had described. "These are the people," he said quietly. "We must go down among them and be friends."

"If they will let us," added Labu doubtfully.

"Art thou afraid?" asked Gigan with a touch of scorn.

"I am thy son," replied Labu proudly, and Gigan was pleased.

Unwrapping the heavy bowl and holding it before him, Gigan went slowly down the hill. Labu followed closely. When they had come quite close to the gathered people

they gave a shout. The red-haired men, who had been sitting in a circle on the grass, leaped to their feet and grasped their long, metal-tipped spears. They thought some enemy had come upon them. But Gigan went on calmly, holding out the bowl and making signs that he wished to be friends with them.

A man who seemed to be the leader stepped out from among the rest and motioned the two travelers to come forward. He took the bowl from Gigan's hand and looked at it in great surprise. Then becoming much excited as he saw the pictures drawn upon the side, he managed to make Gigan understand that he wished to know where he had obtained it.

Of course Gigan could not speak a word they could understand, and for a while it looked as though their lives might be in some danger, as the bowl passed from hand to hand and the men became more and more excited about it. At last Gigan thought of the pictures Labu had made, and bade him see if he could explain it by drawing what he could not tell in words.

Labu smoothed a place in the sand on the shore, and as Gigan told the story Nizek had told him Labu tried to make the pictures repeat it to the strange men. Then Gigan showed them his hunting knife and Labu told them the story of that.

After a while they understood, and then Gigan told them he had come to try to learn where the strange metal was found, that his people might also have better spears and axes and hunting knives.

They were very kind to Gigan and Labu, and showed

them how the metal was made. They told them it was bronze, and was made from tin and copper. That was the first time Gigan had ever heard of making a new substance from two others, and he was much interested. They stayed with their new friends a long time, learning all about how to make and handle the new metal. These people had better tools, with a keener edge, than any Gigan had ever seen, and their ornaments were much more numerous and beautiful. He thought how glad his own people would be to know all these things. It would make them the most powerful clan on the lake, for none of the rest knew the secret of the making of bronze.

At last they felt that they must go back to the Lodge of the Morning. Their kind friends were very sorry to see them go, and loaded them with many gifts. They promised to come to the Lake and change bronze implements for grain and wool.

What a welcome they received when they reached home. All the people met them and brought them across the long pier to the village with great ceremony and rejoicing. Gigan told them of the kindly people he had found, and showed them the gifts made of the new metal.

"It is truly a gift from the gods," he said.

"It is our Chief who is our best gift of the gods," said the people of the Lake.

Gigan laid his hand on Labu's shoulder.

"If the gods had not taught my son how to speak with his fingers, my journey would have brought us naught," he said. "It is Labu who is the gods' best gift, after all."

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